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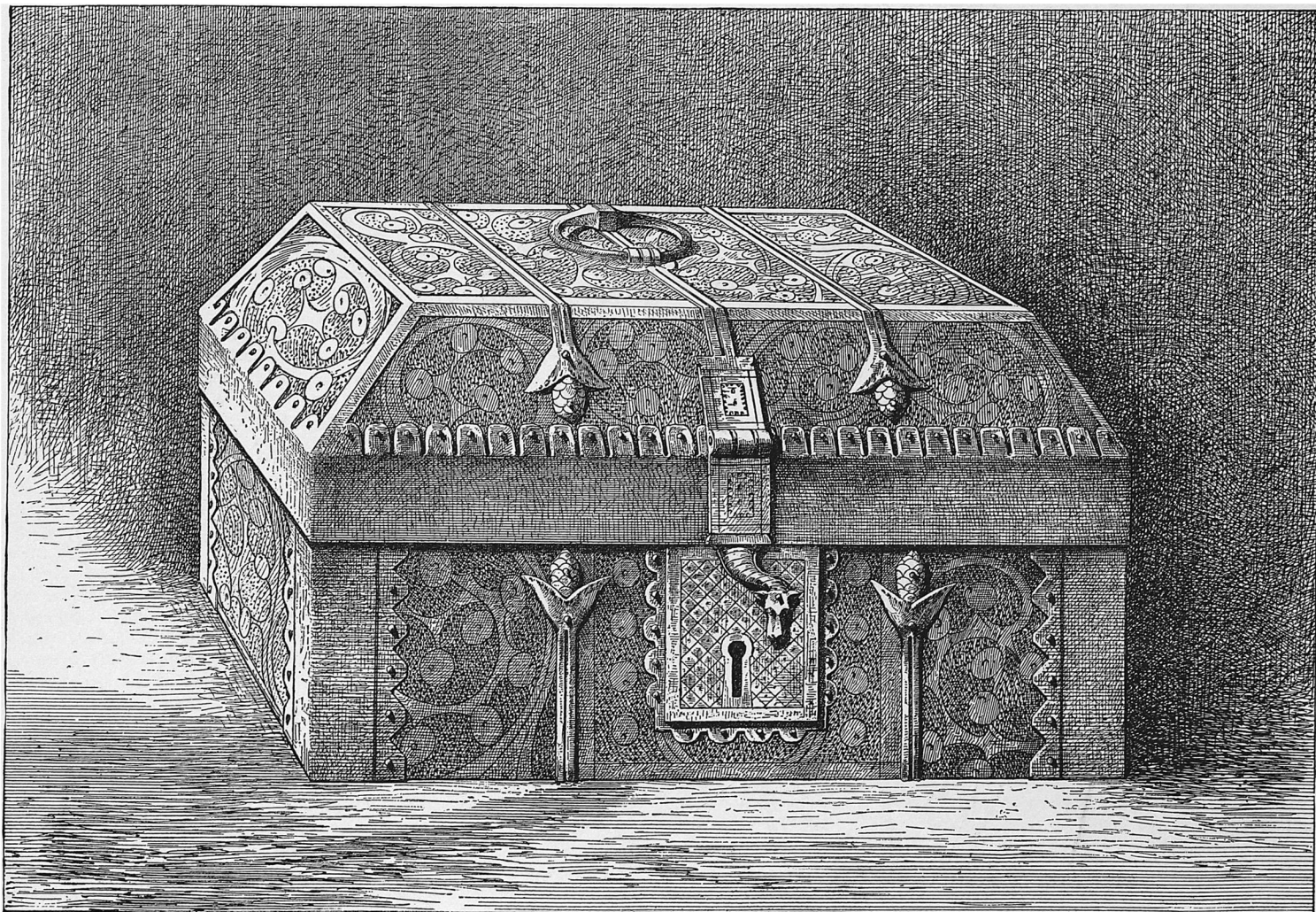
LEATHER WORK.

WE gave not long ago some instructions as to the stamping of leather with small hand stamps in the old Venetian fashion as a preparation for illuminating or painting. Much bolder and more effective work may be attempted with even greater ease if the leather is first boiled or merely macerated in cold water until soft enough. If alum or soft soap be boiled with the leather, the latter as it dries becomes quite hard and remains so. This is of importance in the preparation of small articles, such as caskets and cases, which require a certain degree of stiffness in their materials. For work of this nature the plan commonly followed is that recommended by Charles G. Leland in his little book on the "Minor Arts," which is to boil thin or "kip" leather in alum water, apply it with strong glue on a mould first carefully made of papier-maché and work it into the intricacies of the mould and finish the details with leather worker's tools. This plan may be easy, but it is certainly tedious and

four square feet, the mahogany mould will do. The design may be drawn or traced upon the wood, which may be easily whitened with a wash of Chinese white. Round and V-shaped gouges and chisels of various sizes are used in the cutting, and may be bought of any dealer in wood-workers' tools. The sand-papery is an important part of this preliminary work, as any roughness may quite spoil the result.

The leather being boiled until quite soft, which takes but an hour or so, is pressed quickly into all parts of the mould with a wad of newspaper; then more carefully, part by part, beginning at the centre, with the fingers; finally with wood or bone implements shaped like burnishing tools (the handle of a tooth-brush may answer for one, and a set of sculptor's wooden tools may be all that will be found necessary) it is pressed forcibly into every trait of the design. While the work is going on the leather will be drying and hardening and drawing toward the centre; but it may be kept moist and soft as long as required by a sponge dipped in warm water.

It is in the making of small objects, like the scissors cases which we illustrate, Mr. Leland advises the making of a papier-maché or scrap leather and dextrine mould, which is to remain as a backing within a slight covering of moulded leather. But it is better that this last should be heavy enough to stand alone. The mould for such an object may be prepared in a variety of ways; but the best is to make a wooden core, blocking out, as it were, the general form of the object. The ornament may be carved on this, in relief if it is to be in relief on the finished object, or it may be moulded on it with powdered leather mixed with dextrine or with plaster-of-Paris mixed with gum-arabic and alum, either of which preparations will become hard when dry. The soft leather is pressed around this core, and the ornament is finished by tooling, as has just been described. When finished, a sharp knife is run through three sides, if necessary, of the object and the core removed. The edges are joined, preferably by stitching, while still moist, a job which can be done by any cobbler. The articles can be blackened



FRENCH EMBOSSED LEATHER-COVERED CASKET, WITH BRASS LOCK AND MOUNTINGS. FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

more suited to the mechanic than to the artist, besides which the articles so made can hardly be of a substantial quality; they will hardly, for instance, last as long as the specimens of Gothic leather work from which our illustrations are taken. A better plan is to discard papier-maché and scrap leather and choose a skin heavy enough for the purpose. The model for this, if the work is to be in all respects original, will first be carved out in hard wood, mahogany offering the best grain. It is to be carved in intaglio—that is, the parts that are to be raised in the leather must be cut away in the wood, and the hollows must be carefully rounded and smoothed with sand-paper. If the work undertaken is a large one, such as the panelling of the walls or ceiling of a room, this wooden mould will not answer. It must, in such case, be taken to a foundry and reproduced, both in relief and in intaglio, in iron; and if the use of a press can be had, the relief had better be formed into a roller. But for the work usually attempted by amateurs, which will not go beyond a few copies of a panel, say of three or

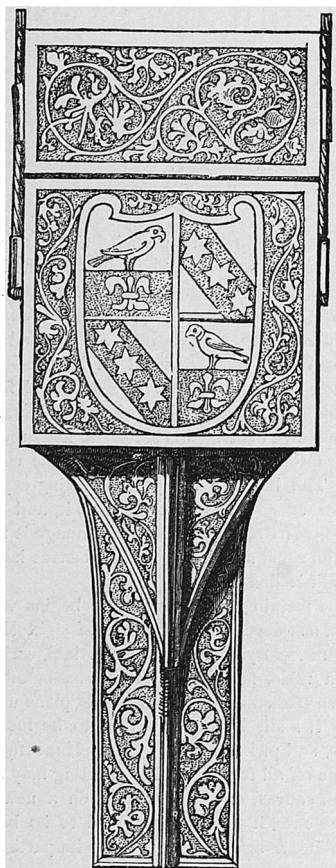
It will be readily understood that, on being lifted out of its wooden mould, the leather panel will present the design in relief, but without sharpness or precision. This, however, is but a beginning. Before allowing it to dry thoroughly and harden much may be done by filling in the flat spaces by means of small stamps, as already recommended in treating of unboiled leather work. Book-binder's stamps are the best, and may be had cheaply in great variety. Small punches are sometimes used to produce a hammered appearance, chisels and roulette wheels for lines, and when very thick leather is used lines may be incised with a sharp penknife or with a narrow wood-engraver's gouge. These incised lines, cut with the knife, are very common in good Gothic work, and give it much of its peculiar character. In the upper panel which is shown on page 44, and which would answer well for a piano front, all the outlines of the figures and ornamental foliage were probably produced in this way. The engraving with the gouge would be done when the panel is dry, in which state it cuts like wood.

with black ink or browned with bichromate of potash mixed with water. This last stain renders it waterproof after exposure to the sunlight, but it is poisonous.

Painting, silvering, gilding and illuminating can be done on boiled leather as well as on ordinary leather; but there are other modes of ornamentation which we have not before treated of. One of these is to press into the soft leather stamps cut out of sheet brass or other metal. The leather will swell out in the interstices, and when the stamps are removed will show the patterns in relief. If the stamps are heated before applying them to the leather, the impression which they make will be colored dark brown, which will add to the effectiveness of the ornamentation. The stamps themselves may be left imbedded in the leather and may be fastened by small rivets. Ivory, wood and other substances may be imbedded in the same way, making a very effective, though rude sort of encrusted work. Finally, the soft leather may be moulded freely by hand, just as wax or clay may be moulded, and the flat parts may be covered or partly

covered with a mosaic of scraps of various colored morocco, as in artistic book-binding. Vellum or parchment panels boiled and moulded as above look very much like rude ivory carvings.

Taken altogether, what with repoussé, intaglio, carved, engraved, moulded and impressed work, gilding, illuminating, stitching, staining, stamping, branding, mosaic and encrusted work, it may be said that, for the amateur with only ordinary means, leather decoration offers the most fascinating of all the arts that may be practised at home and without special training. Panels of considerable size, if well designed and carefully executed by hand, would probably find ready sale in the principal cities at remunerative prices; but small objects, such as card receivers, cases and the like, are manufactured so cheaply that the amateur cannot hope to compete with them.



GERMAN STAMPED LEATHER ÉTUI. SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

THE ART OF MAKING SMOKE PICTURES.

A SMOKE picture is one in black and white, in which the black, with its different tints, consists entirely of smoke. It may closely resemble an etching when the needle point is used to manipulate the smoke on the surface over which it is distributed. Its success depends upon the ability to secure in smoke every degree of tint, from pure white to the deepest black, and to have each tint properly located. A very good surface to work upon is what is called milk glass—opaque, smoothly polished, white glass. Tiles answer as well, such as are used in mineral painting, but they are more expensive, and can be obtained generally only in small sizes, whereas the milk glass comes in large plates and can be cut to any size desired. Though much thinner than tiles, the amount of heat required in smoking is not sufficient to break even the thinnest plates if ordinary precaution be used. Very effective pictures can be made upon white cardboard also, but the methods of work are somewhat different and they will not be given in this article.

The glass having been selected and cut to the size desired, clean it thoroughly with soap and water, and then, to secure it for work, place it, with the polished side up, on a flat wooden board, large enough to allow a margin of at least an inch all around. The ordinary drawing-board would answer, but it is in most cases unnecessarily heavy. Any carpenter can put together a few quarter inch strips, properly braced to prevent warping, either by cross-pieces at the ends, as in the ordinary drawing-board, or by gluing or nailing cross-pieces to the back.

It is necessary to avoid warping, as any change from the flat surface may break the glass before the picture is completed. A very convenient way to keep it in proper position is by means of ordinary screw eyes inserted close enough to the glass for the eyes to overlap, but not close enough to press the glass tightly in any direction; they should be put about three or four inches apart. The screw eyes, projecting over the glass, support it when inverted over the flame for smoking. By turning them a little the glass can readily be removed and replaced at any time.

A little practice will soon make one familiar with the action of smoke and the methods of work; then, with patience and care, any picture, almost, may be attempted with good promise of success at the first effort. As a commencement, lighting an ordinary gas-jet, pass the inverted tile or glass once or twice through the flame until the surface is pretty darkly smoked; then, with the finger or hard brush, remove the smoke in spots and the clean china will be exposed; then, with a very soft brush, do the same in other places, and it will be noticed that it has not entirely cleared away the smoke, but that the glass remains somewhat tinted. If this tinted surface is resmoked and the soft brush applied again over the same place, the remaining tint will be a little darker than before, a certain amount of smoke adhering each time. The more often this is done, the darker the tint becomes, until a quite dark surface is obtained which a light brushing will not remove. From a darkened surface secured in this way varying tints can be obtained down to the white of the glass by softer or harder brushes—the darker the starting tint the more gradations will, of course, be possible.

In this preliminary light brushing I have used an old long varnish brush, pulling it to pieces and tying up small portions. It will be well to provide yourself for general use with a variety of brushes, small and large, firm and flexible, hard and soft, hog-hair and sable, and what are called blenders or softeners. For background effects, firm round brushes with flat ends are useful; sharpen the ends of the wooden handle of some, and make a slit in the end of the handle of others and insert a fine needle, securing it by thread wound tightly around.

Try the effects of working with these different brushes or tools, and you will readily learn how to grade the tints perfectly, the pointed stick ends, and the needle points, being effective in removing all traces of smoke in as small a spot as may be desired; with the needle point also, the smoke can be very evenly graded.

With the softeners and flat end brushes try the effects secured by gently patting the smoked surfaces without brushing, smoking and repatting if desired; various mottled effective background effects can be obtained by this direct stroke of the brush even when the glass has been but once smoked.

It is convenient to work sometimes with the glass upright. This can be done by means of rubber tubes attached to the gas-jet, and having burner tips inserted in the other end. Candle and other wicks are good smokers for small spaces, and for correcting little mistakes, but the ordinary gas-burner, with the flame at different heights, answers every purpose, and is all the writer has used for a great variety of pictures.

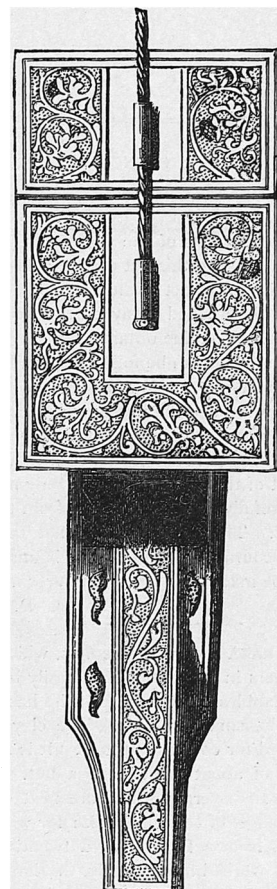
With the ability to secure whatever tint may be desired, and to locate it correctly, any picture may be attempted. It will be well to begin with a simple one having strong contrasts of black and white. Prepare the tint as before described, over the entire surface of the glass, leaving it, after the last smoking, unbrushed, and as dark as necessary where the darkest places are likely to come. Then, with the different brushes, carefully brush in the lighter tints where they belong. The softer and smaller the brushes, the better to begin with. If, when this has been done, it is found that the picture is not dark enough, as a whole or in parts, give a quick resmoking, and brush out again where necessary. The darker the working tint to begin with, the less occasion there will be for this resmoking. Sometimes only small spots need darkening; for these turn the gas low, and quickly expose just these spots.

Do not allow any smoking to obliterate entirely the outlines that have been made. If they seem to be lost at any time, they can probably be discovered by inclining the surface at different angles to the light, and then, while in the right position, indicated again by the needle point. Very few pictures can be completed without at least one resmoking after the outlines and values have been brushed and marked in. It will save time to leave the highest lights until the last, an intermediate tint answering until

then. A little experience will help very much in this and prove the best teacher.

The needle and pointed stick will be found indispensable in places which require accurate or delicate work, and where perfect shading is needed, as in figures, hands and faces, and important outlines of any kind. The brush alone, in such instances, will not answer, as it is impossible with it to remove the smoke with perfect accuracy. With the needle point you can pick your way carefully and make no mistakes but such as are easily remedied after a little resmoking. The needle, in fact, will prove so useful that it will be resorted to more often than necessary, when the brush would do the work as well and more quickly.

When the picture is considered finished, it only remains to fix it. The ordinary charcoal and crayon fix-



SIDE VIEW OF THE OLD GERMAN LEATHER ÉTUI
ON THE OPPOSITE COLUMN.

atives accomplish this, but the result is unsatisfactory, and there is a much better method which leaves nothing to be desired, and that is by pouring varnish over the surface. I have used Soehnée Frères' and Devoe's retouching varnish with perfect success. It should be done as quickly and evenly as possible, as these varnishes are speedy driers; otherwise little ridges would be left. I suppose any thin transparent varnish would answer the purpose. If the picture is a small one, hold it in a horizontal position, pour on enough varnish to cover it completely, and then, tipping the glass, allow it to run off at one corner. Small pieces of blotting-paper held against the edges of the glass absorb what may remain there.

When the picture is a large one, it is desirable to adopt a little different method. Allow for a small margin in making the picture, and, when ready for varnishing, clean the margin a little and run a small ridge of putty down the sides, leading to a small opening at the lower edge in the centre of the margin, then, when the picture is tipped a little, the varnish may be freely poured on, covering every portion of the picture, and allowed to run off at the opening below into a cup or saucer. Place the picture to dry where it will be free from dust; it will not take long, and the smooth varnished surface will be very permanent and satisfactory. No glass will be required in framing, and it can be dusted carefully without injury.

If there should be reason to repeat an effective picture, and it is a copy of a photograph or engraving, the principal features of the original may be drawn upon trac-